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Letter dated 18 August 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a press statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, entitled "Stop Eritrea's war crimes in the twenty-first century", issued on 18 August 2000 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Fesseha A. **Tessema**
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Annex to the letter dated 18 August 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

18 August 2000

Stop Eritrea's war crimes in the twenty-first century

The war crimes being committed against Ethiopian citizens in Eritrea are worsening by the day. Over 30,000 Ethiopians are incarcerated in concentration camps and large numbers are in prison. Since the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities in June this year, over 20,000 have been forced to walk through minefields and cross rivers in full flood. To make matters worse, selected Ethiopian women are being detained by Eritrean troops in the border area for even harsher treatment and rape. In the past few days alone the whereabouts of 10 women separated from the rest by soldiers near the Mereb River is unknown. Bodies of three of the above-mentioned women have been washed ashore the Mereb River. They were murdered by the Eritrean troops to silence the testimony of their rape.

Furthermore, families of officers of the Tigrai Development Association in Eritrea imprisoned in Sambal Central Prison, Asmara, for over two years were informed that they no longer needed to provide food for their imprisoned family members. It is feared that these persons may have been killed.

The Eritrean regime has been responsible for the disappearance of thousands of Ethiopians in Eritrea. How many of the "disappeared" are alive in concentration camps or dead is not known. No one, not even the International Committee of the Red Cross, has access to the slave labour camps in Eritrea.

Returnees have so far provided the names and details of 1,074 of their disappeared relatives. The evidence is being compiled of these unfortunate people, whose plight is unknown. They may be alive. They may have been killed. A vivid testimony to these disappearances has appeared in a new publication entitled "Stop Eritrea's war crimes in the twenty-first century", published by the non-governmental organization, the Law Forum for Peace.

The fact that the Eritrean authorities have stepped up their crimes against Ethiopian nationals in Eritrea following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement is evidence of the desire by Eritrea to continue the war by other means, and to deny the two countries the possibility of conclusively ending the conflict. The regime in Asmara is engaged in activities that could result in the unravelling of the peace process.

Ethiopia has been appealing to anyone who would listen to do what is possible to put a stop to the war crimes perpetuated against the defenceless by the Eritrean regime, so far without result. The international community cannot ignore what is happening and allow such inhumanity to continue. All that Ethiopia is asking is for its nationals to be freed from bondage and allowed to return home in safety and in the presence of ICRC, and for Ethiopian prisoners of war to be visited by ICRC. Unfortunately this is too much to ask of the Eritrean authorities.

Ethiopia has the obligation to protect its citizens from the crimes being committed against them by the cruel and irresponsible regime in Eritrea. Ethiopia

has so far exercised restraint in the hope that the international community could prevail upon Asmara. But there is a limit to restraint and the regime in Eritrea should consider itself warned that it will be held responsible for all the consequences of its actions.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia appeals for the last time to the international community to save Ethiopians from a regime that is committing war crimes in this day and age against innocent and unprotected civilians.

1. Ethiopians who wish to be repatriated to their homeland must be allowed to do so without any discrimination of sex, age or religion, in the presence of ICRC.

2. The cruel practice of forcing Ethiopians into slave labour camps must be stopped immediately. The thousands of Ethiopians languishing in such camps have to be released, and those who choose to return to their country must be allowed to do so.

3. Those who have disappeared must be accounted for. It has to be reported whether the "disappeared" are alive or dead.

4. Ethiopians jailed in Eritrea's jails for the only reason of being Ethiopians must be immediately released. Those that wish to return to Ethiopia should be allowed to leave Eritrea.

5. The International Committee of the Red Cross and other mandated bodies have to be provided immediate access to Ethiopian prisoners of war. Information must be provided on their condition, on those who are alive and those who have died. Prisoners of war must be provided the possibility to communicate with their families as stipulated by the Geneva Convention.

6. The Eritrean authorities should put an end to the repugnant propaganda of hate and intolerance that is causing much moral and psychological damage to the victims, and harming the peace process as a whole.

7. An international team made up of representatives of the Organization of African Unity, the European Union and the United Nations should be immediately dispatched to Eritrea to look into the situation in the concentration camps and prisons and with regard to the prisoners of war.